

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 3 February 2020 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor E Adam (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors O Milburn, B Avery, A Batey, D Bell, L Brown, J Carr, B Coult, R Crute, S Dunn, K Hawley, J Higgins, L Maddison, R Manchester, A Simpson and M Wilson

Co-opted Member:

Mr T Bolton

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs P Holding.

2 Substitute Members

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

4 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

5 Flood Risk Management Authorities for County Durham

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Resources that provided background information on the role and responsibilities of the Environment and Sustainable Communities OSC as the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Committee for County Durham prior to receiving a presentation on the water management policies within the County Durham Plan and presentations from the Flood Risk Management Authorities for County Durham (for copy of report and slides of presentations, see file of minutes).

County Durham Plan – Water Management Policies

The Committee received a presentation from the Senior Policy Officer: Regeneration and Local Services that highlighted the following points:

- County Durham Plan Update
 - Examination (Autumn/Winter 2019/20)
 - Action Points (January 2020)
 - Further Hearing Session (Feb 2020)
- County Durham Plan Next Steps
 - Inspectors Interim Report (Spring 2020)
 - Modifications Consultation (Spring/Summer)
 - Final Inspector's Report (Summer)
 - Adoption (Autumn)

The Senior Policy Officer informed the Committee that during the public examination of the County Durham Plan the Inspector had only raised one question in relation to water management. The question was around whether the Plan was informed by a strategic flood risk assessment (SFRA) and whether it applied a sequential, risk-based approach to the location of development. Including taking into account current and future impacts of climate change and to ensure the development proposed in the Plan avoided areas at highest risk of flooding.

The Senior Policy Officer highlighted that the full response could be found online in the examination library but confirmed that the strategic policies of the plan had been informed by a SFRA including the allocations and flood management policies.

The response to the Inspector also made clear that the SFRA assessed the risk at the time it was prepared, as well as the increased risk from a number of factors including a changing climate and the construction of new development. The Council had requested a minor modification to the supporting text of the policy to make clear that the SFRA is an assessment of flood risk at a given point in time and that, in decision making, it is also necessary to take into account up-to-date Environment Agency flood maps and climate change allowances.

It was confirmed that a further hearing session on the plan would be held on the 6 February 2020 which would focus on questions from the inspector in relation to housing land supply and that would then conclude the hearing sessions for the examination.

Environment Agency

The Committee received a presentation from the Team Leader Partnerships and Strategic Overview, Durham and Tees Valley Environment Agency that highlighted the following points:

- The Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Investment Programme which runs from 2015 -2021, including detail of: the Northumbria wide indicative programme with the majority of the funding coming from central government and

topped up by the local levy; County Durham indicative programme with 8 projects in the final year

- Allocation for 2020/21 for County Durham and Pipeline beyond 2021
- Flood Alleviation Scheme Updates – Detail of progress of Weardale Natural Flood Management Demonstrator with planned installation of 85 natural flood management features resulting in a reduction in flood risk to 150 properties and will inform the development of NFM schemes in the future.
- Spring Gardens Dam Trash Screen – will ensure the protection of 565 properties
- Community Engagement including the appointment of an officer by the Environment Agency to work with Durham and Darlington CCU
- Asset Maintenance
- The Future
 - New FCERM Strategy
 - Demonstrating new ways of working
 - Contributing to economic regeneration/growth
 - Integrated management of flood risk – Northumbria Integrated Drainages Partnership studies progressing
 - Preparing for the next investment period

The Chairman thanked the Team Leader for his presentation and asked of the 30 projects identified, how were these priorities identified and how did they know that the right resources had been put into the area.

The Team Leader responded that the prioritisation of the projects was based on the benefits the scheme could deliver in reducing flood risk. He continued that a tool was used, a partnership funding calculator that provided a cost benefit ratio for each scheme, which prioritised the various schemes for consideration with the schemes then submitted on a programme to government to be ratified. A new partnership funding calculator tool is in development which may help calculate funding available for the schemes that delivered wider benefits, that reduced flood risks but also contributed to other benefits like economic regeneration. These schemes went into the calculator and were ranked against other schemes and bids from across the country. The government would then allocate a certain level of funding to some projects, the Environment Agency would then put that onto the programme and in some circumstances would look at other external sources of funding to accelerate a project.

Councillor Avery indicated that Durham did not have the severe flooding incidents when compared to other areas of the country and commented that the introduction of various flood mitigation schemes in the county appeared to have conquered the flooding issues.

The Team Leader responded that the work carried out by the EA results in a reduction of flood risk rather than having conquered flooding however Durham had been fortunate in recent times in terms of large flooding incidents.

Councillor Millburn referred to all members having an area in their ward that were subject to flooding as a result of surface drainage and asked if this type of flooding was in the remit of the Environment Agency.

The Team Leader responded that surface water flooding was the responsibility of the local authority, but funding for surface water schemes can be administered through the Environment Agency.

Councillor Batey suggested that in relation to community engagement they should use the Area Action Partnerships and elected members.

The Team Leader responded that they had used the Area Action Partnerships in particular in the first year of the scheme which had been very beneficial and that local members were engaged with in areas in the county where the officer was undertaking various activities. He then referred to a highlight report that the Community Engagement Officer produced every month that could be shared with members.

The Chair responded that it would be useful if this report could be shared with members of the committee.

Mr Bolton referred to coastal erosion and glacial melt and commented that in County Durham at Seaham protection measures are in place however towards Hawthorn there is a danger of the railway line being at risk from coastal erosion. He then asked if planning had taken place to look at protecting the railway line in the future.

The Team Leader responded that coastal erosion came under the same remit and that these schemes were on the same programme and managed in the same way as flood risk schemes.

The Senior Area Drainage Manager indicated that Seaham coast was defended and maintained and that the railway line would be looked at and investigated when appropriate however it was being monitored.

Drainage and Coastal Team

The Committee Received a Presentation from the Strategic Highway Manager and the Senior Area Drainage Engineer that highlighted the following points:

- Review for 2019/20
- Grant Funded Schemes for 2019/20
- Going Forward
- Medium Term Investment Plan 2019 -2027 – providing detail of various schemes
- Working Groups showing engagement between the FRMAs for County Durham
- Schemes including Lanchester and Chester-le-street
- Joint studies with NW
- Flooding examples in the county

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation and stated that some interesting work was been carried out.

Councillor Maddison indicated that last year she had raised issues with SuDS in Spennymoor, in particular the Whitworth development and had talked about protection to stop people getting access to them. She continued that there had been a problem this year with water draining off from the new estate into a channel that was very close to the

new properties and next to pathways, from a planning perspective, after SuDS have been introduced, what follow up takes place with developers to ensure they are maintaining the systems in the manner they have agreed to at the pre planning stage. She was finding issues in relation to water draining from the newer estates onto the older estates down the bank.

The Senior Area Drainage Engineer responded that part of their function in the team was to check and vet planning applications for major developments. Developers were required to not increase flood risk as part of the development and reduce the flood risk wherever possible. Builders were obliged to build as designed and if there were short fallings, they have enforcement powers that could be used. They would insist on a management plan which covered the full length of the development and show that they had a plan for ongoing maintenance. The purpose of SuDS is to slow/reduce water flow down so channels could cope with the flow of water and do not increase the risk to others.

Councillor Simpson referred to Witton Gilbert village that was flooded in 2011 and with the help of Northumbrian Water and Durham County Council, a flood defence scheme was put in place however there was a lack of maintenance. The area needed cleaning and was overgrown with trees and shrubs and looked untidy. He continued that he had been informed that the design of the slope for maintenance is too steep and asked if it was a bad design, why had the scheme been agreed in the first place.

The Senior Area Drainage Engineer responded they the area may look overgrown, but it is doing what it had been designed to do, stop flooding in that particular area. When the scheme had first been designed it had been thought wildflowers would not need much maintenance, they had installed extra steps for access and the area was trimmed twice a year, but it had been taken over by weeds. The weeds had been spot treated and they would check if they needed a second treatment once the growing season started.

In response to a question, Members were advised that the clean and green team were involved in the maintenance of the scheme at Witton Gilbert.

The Chair stated that the Committee had been to this site on two occasions and they had commented on the area being overgrown and had been informed that the site was maintained.

Councillor Batey referred to a planning application in her ward at Urpeth Grange for houses to be built on a flood plain and at the planning stage it had been asked that flood mitigation measures be included involving the introduction of tanks, but there were issues with the maintenance of these tanks as a Property management company was responsible for the maintenance of the site. Councillor Batey continued that maintenance of SUDs and flood mitigation measures were not being addressed at the planning stage. The Senior Area Drainage Engineer responded that they did insist on a management plan and that this was sometimes done by management companies. He continued that Durham County Council had taken on the maintenance of SuDS and that Northumbrian Water would in the future also take on the adoption of SuDS.

The Chair asked whether government needs to be lobbied in relation to the adoption of SuDS. The Senior Area Drainage Engineer responded that this had been done and it is expected that government will issue guidance later this year.

Councillor Avery commented that flooding in his local area resulted from blocked gullies. The Strategic Highway Manager advised Members that they had a maintenance programme for gully cleaning but if there were any particular issues, if they could provide the team with the details then the team would investigate.

Councillor Coult referred to the River Browney at Langley Park where the weir had been washed away which had affected the flow of the water which had started to erode the river bank and asked if there were plans to replace the weir or if not how could she get this included in a programme.

The Team Leader Partnerships and Strategic Overview, Durham and Tees Valley Environment Agency advised Councillor Coult that he would investigate this.

The Strategic Highway Manager advised that his department were aware of the issues and some works had been carried out and monitoring was taken place, however currently this was not affecting or causing damage to the bridge and he would provide an update to Councillor Coult.

Councillor Coult referred to the issues with gullies and asked about the frequency of the cleaning.

The Strategic Highway Manager advised Members that the frequency of cleaning for gullies was different for locations some were on a 3-monthly cycle, but others were annually. He accepted that there were issues during the autumn leaf fall but if there were any particular issues, then they could review the maintenance cycle.

The Chair asked if the schemes scheduled for between 2021 and 2027 would they be complete by 2027 and how were they prioritised.

The Senior Area Drainage Engineer responded that funding each year was prioritised depending on the protection level the scheme would provide, if it was a less expensive scheme but would protect a number of properties then this scheme would be given a high priority.

Northumbrian Water

The Committee Received a Presentation from the Strategic Studies Lead Project Manager that highlighted the following points:

- Northumbria Integrated Drainage Partnership – detail of partners
- Update on Completed Sewer Network Schemes
- Update on Current Sewer Network Schemes
- Update on Planned Sewer Network Schemes
- Sewage Treatment Works Investment
- Drainage and Wastewater Plan – new to all water companies in the UK and brings drainage and waste water management in line with water supply management planning
- Adoption of SuDS – Update – from 1 April 2020 Northumbrian Water must adopt SuDS offered for adoption by developers when they meet the definition of a sewer

- Reducing Flooding from Blocked Sewers
- Community Portal

The Chair thanked the officer for her presentation and indicated that the community portal was a valuable tool. He then referred to the 'bin the wipe' campaign and commented that manufacturers state that various wipes are flushable. He then asked what work was taking place with manufacturers to help resolve the issue of wipes causing blocked sewers.

The Strategic Studies Lead Project Manager responded that they were working with manufactures to highlight that wipes do not break down like toilet roll and this results in blockages of the sewer system.

The Chair referred to an incident in his area with wipes and how this had resulted in a major problem in his local area.

The Strategic Studies Lead Project Manager referred to the results of a survey where it was found that 55% of people did not have a waste bin in their bathroom. This had resulted in Northumbrian Water Limited undertaking a campaign where they had given out 1400 waste bins to alleviate wipes being flushed down the toilet.

Councillor Avery asked if information about the 'bin the wipe' scheme was available on the Council's website.

The Strategic Studies Lead Project Manager indicated that she was happy for her team to share this information with Durham County Council to promote the scheme.

Councillor Dunn commented that his local community would be happy to work with Northumbrian Water Limited and make local people aware that these wipes do not break down once in the sewer system and result in blockages. He continued that as manufactures are saying they flushable then this was misrepresentation.

The Strategic Studies Lead Project Manager responded that some lobbying work was being carried out.

Councillor Dunn then referred to the portal and that there were no details on the Bowburn scheme for stage 2.

The Strategic Studies Lead Project Manager provided Councillor Dunn with an update and commented that Stage 2 was near completion in the next 2 to 3 months with an update to appear on the portal.

Councillor Coult asked the officer if members could be provided with some information on the 'Bin the Wipe' scheme so that they could get the message out to their local communities.

The Strategic Studies Lead Project Manager commented that there is information available which she could share with members.

The Chair commented that the committee needs to be kept updated in relation to the various work of the FRMA's but also members can be pro-active in their local communities and support campaigns such as 'Bin the Wipe'.

Resolved: (i) That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in its role as the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Committee for County Durham note the information contained in the report and presentations.

(ii) That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in its role as the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Committee for County Durham receives further presentations from the Risk Management Authorities at a future special meeting of the committee arranged for February 2021.